

ATHE 2014 Conference Scottsdale, AZ

July 24-27, 2014

Fairmont Scottsdale Princess Hotel



Dream Acts: Performance as Refuge, Resistance, and Renewal

In 2014 we come together in a setting that seems impossible – the desert, in July! – and yet speaks to the human capacity to dream, imagine, transform, and overcome. At the same time, the geopolitical landscape of Arizona offers us a chance to reflect on our responsibilities as artists and educators to the land, to the multiple histories it harbors, and to the next generation of artist/activist/citizens who have charged us with nurturing and shaping their dreams. The historical DREAM Act speaks to this charge. But the conjoining of dreaming to action engages the particular work of performance. ATHE 2014 invites you to take inspiration from the desert to consider how performance dreams forth the possible from the impossible, offering opportunities for refuge, resistance, resilience and renewal.

Specifically, we invite members, committees, and focus groups to engage the notion of dream acts in a desert—metaphorically or literally—from any of a number of points.

Production

How, for instance, has theatre historically served as a space of dreaming? From Bhāsa (*The Dream of Vāssavadattā*) to Calderón (*Life is a Dream*) and Strindberg (*The Dream Play*) to Walcott (*Dream on Monkey Mountain*) to Svich (*The Archeology of Dreams*) to any of a hundred more, playwrights have used the stage to make the ethereal manifest, to bring the not-quite-there into the here-and-now. How might such past examples stir present and future artists to imagine newer and even bolder ways to dream through performance? How do revolutions in technology and communication revise our definitions of the real or the possible?

Political Action

Such artistic re-visions can also inspire political action. Activist visionaries have long capitalized on theatre to embody utopian possibilities for a better world, fantasy reversals of the status quo, or even nightmare warnings about the future. How does theatre additionally provide respites to groups and causes in need of renewal and recharge? How, alternately, does theatre force audiences to “sleep no more,” snapping them out of their reveries to continue wide-awake struggles?

Profession

We are particularly focused on the “deserts” in our profession, settings of struggle that make dreaming so difficult and yet so crucial. For peers navigating an uncertain job market or working in difficult circumstances, what visions can we pursue to renew the hope for a fulfilling career? For our students, what dreams of academic and professional theatre shape our pedagogy? When, on the other hand, is it the job of theatre educators to challenge the visions our students bring to us?

Im/Possibilities

How can we help each other distinguish between a bold, necessary daring “to dream the impossible dream” and a misdirected tilting at windmills? How do we confront the fact that one group’s certain vision for a better world (a better production, a better curriculum, a better theatre, a better society) may loom like a nightmare for others? As artists, as scholars, and as teachers, how, when, and where might we temper the romance of dreaming with a sober consideration of “what Dreams may come”?



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